
WARNING!

The views expressed in FMSO publications and reports are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

Mexico's Other Insurgents

by Dr. Graham H. Turbiville, JR.,
Foreign Military Studies Office, Fort Leavenworth, KS.



A central post-Cold War security issue is the fate of insurgent movements that received weapons, equipment and political support for decades from the Soviet bloc and other communist states around the world. In Latin America, where the development and consolidation of democratic regimes often is accompanied by promises of free-market economic and open-trade policies, the virtual shutoff of outside support to insurgents seemed to assure their eventual dissolution. In the 1990s, Central American peace accords and electoral successes and South American counterinsurgency gains, as in Peru, reinforced this view.¹

Optimistic assessments based on these events may yet prove to be accurate. But as the century winds down, troubling developments in the Southern Hemisphere suggest that "guerrilla" problems may plague some Latin American governments as they pursue national progress, prosperity and stability. Specialists within and outside the region point to political, legislative and judicial institutions whose reform has been incomplete and whose inefficiencies and corruption have fostered growing popular resentment. In addition, for some Latin American states, faltering free-market economies, shaky financial policies and the failure to deliver on social programs have resulted in greater inequities in the distribution of wealth and opportunity. Although the poorest sectors of society bear the greatest burden, the middle classes are increasingly affected and resentful.²

Crime and violence have increased in some Latin American states as a result of difficult economic circumstances, high unemployment and weakened institutions following years of conflicts. Demobilizing military-and insurgent-establishments has increased the number of unemployed, who sometimes turn to crime and banditry. In some areas, drug trafficking remains a seductive income source, as well as a major contributor to criminal and random violence. The police's inability to deal with acute crime has forced some states-Brazil, El Salvador, Guatemala and Mexico-to temporarily use their militaries to deal with criminals. This has raised concerns-well founded or not-about *militarization* and the emergence of "populist military leaders" who may seize power to ensure order and stability.³

In this late 20th-century environment, where democratic leaders are trying to solve difficult political, economic, social and security issues, some old guerrilla movements are showing signs of life. "Revolutionary" programs include toppling existing regimes, seizing power, redressing enduring national problems and even entering the political process. While at least echoes of old Soviet, Cuban, and Maoist versions of Marxism-Leninism and anti-imperialist rhetoric and ideology remain, issues of national or local power and personal or organizational profit are becoming movement motivators. Although communist state support has generally ended, mobilized foreign leftist interest and lobbying have not. Traditional rallies, newsletters, visiting delegations, "peace brigades" and even the Internet-whose real impact is yet to be determined-are ways revolutionaries influence populations and supporters.⁴

More specifically, Latin America's recent "old guerrilla" activity includes resignation and indifference as well as efforts to win integrated government roles.⁵ It has also included actions ranging from well-planned surprise strikes against specific targets to preparation for major new campaigns and offensives. For example, in Chile, a faction of the Manuel Rodríguez Patriotic Front (FPMR) executed the stunning December 1996 helicopter escape of four FPMR leaders from a maximum security prison near Santiago. The FPMR action immediately brought the group into the public spotlight again, raised the specter of other impending strikes and introduced a sensitive new issue into Chilean internal politics regarding the current "threat of radical groups."⁶

Despite being badly damaged by Peruvian security forces throughout the 1990s, both the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) and the larger Maoist Sendero Luminoso (SL), or Shining Path, have sustained themselves with funding from drug trafficking, kidnapping and robbery, as well as with international support. The MRTA's successful December 1996 seizure of important Peruvian and international hostages, followed by four months of posturing and negotiations before Peruvian security forces successfully ended the crisis, momentarily re-established the group as a serious threat to Peru.⁷ The SL's reorganization attempts have been accompanied by periodic attacks in Peru's urban and rural areas and a frequently stated promise that the "people's war will continue."⁸ Both groups have Internet sites.

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and the smaller National Liberation Army pose the greatest armed threat to a Latin American state. With longstanding ties to narcotrafficking and skilled in extortion, robbery and kidnapping, these groups have vowed that 1997 will see an intensification of the "internal war."⁹ Overall, events of the past six months suggest that even small, badly damaged Latin American groups possess:

- A capacity to use stunning strikes and successes to surprise the governments they oppose.
- An ability and willingness to sustain themselves with drug trafficking, kidnapping, robbery, extortion and foreign donations.
- An ability to attract sympathizers and activists internationally.
- A continued willingness to cooperate in joint ventures.
- Skill in exploiting enduring political, economic and social problems.

Mexico presents special concerns. It is vital to Mexican and US security that existing and incipient insurgent movements be examined, understood and resolved. This is an undertaking as

complex and challenging as any in Latin America, which forms a backdrop to what may be happening in Mexico. This article addresses the spectrum of Mexican insurgent groups over the years and highlights some complexities that make Mexican guerrillas an important topic for research and assessment.

Old Guerrillas, Zapatistas and the Lucio Cabañas Legacy

Demographic projections from the 1995 Mexican census indicated that Mexico's population would grow to about 93 million by the beginning of 1997.¹⁰

Like the rest of the industrialized and industrializing world, Mexico's population had become more heavily urbanized than just five years before. With urban populations concentrated primarily in northern Mexico's large cities, the largely rural south presents a striking contrast in development, wealth and opportunity. Land distribution and agricultural reform are particularly contentious issues. Recent severe national economic setbacks have exacerbated poverty in the south. As Mexican commentators in and out of government have noted, rebellion in Chiapas, a series of highly publicized assassinations, institutional corruption, drug traffickers' growing power and rising crime rates have led to popular dissatisfaction with the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and its free-market/open-trade economic program (dubbed "neoliberalism" throughout Latin America). These problems-far from unique in the hemisphere or elsewhere in the world-have preoccupied President Ernesto Zedillo and the Mexican leadership for the last three and a half years and have been joined by the proliferation of guerrilla groups in the south and elsewhere. While Mexico has been spared the tragedy of major regime-threatening insurgencies, the country does have a history of communist and other radical group insurgency and terrorism.

More than 20 years before "Subcomandante Marcos," Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) spokesman and leader, became world famous, Mexico's most celebrated guerrilla leader was a former rural schoolteacher named Lucio Cabañas Barrientos.

Leading the military arm of his Party of the Poor (PdP), Cabañas operated successfully for years in the rugged mountains of Mexico's Guerrero state. For many Mexicans, the PdP's Peasant Brigade of Justice ambushes of military and police units, kidnappings, bank robberies and other armed actions were an unwelcome specter of communist revolution that by the late 1960s and early 1970s seemed to be gaining ground in Mexico as it had in other parts of Latin America. To others, however, Cabañas was a strong champion against an oppressive local regime and an indifferent central government whose policies had perpetuated the poverty, lack of opportunity and brutality that characterized day-to-day life in much of rural Mexico. Cabañas had a multipoint program that called for defeating the government of the rich and installing a new regime; expropriating factories and facilities for the workers' benefit; enacting broad financial, judicial, educational and social welfare reforms that focused on workers, peasants, Indians and women; and removing Mexico from the colonialism of the United States and other foreign countries.¹¹



Lucio Cabañas

When Cabañas and several key followers were finally hunted down and killed in Guerrero by the Mexican army in late 1974, it was cause for both official Mexican celebration as well as deep disappointment among some in Mexico's southern Sierra Madre who saw Cabañas as a romantic revolutionary leader fighting for justice in rural Mexico. North of the border, however, Cabañas and his comrades' deaths earned only a short notice on the *New York Times'* back pages and limited commentary thereafter.¹² The United States, focused on a host of Cold War security issues, had only passing interest in the death of an obscure Mexican insurgent whose group posed no serious military threat to the Mexican government.



Subcomandante Marcos with the EZLN.

late 1950s' student activism and fueled by real inequities in wealth, opportunity and justice, small Mexican groups became increasingly militant and inclined to armed action in the 1960s. Radical groups became associated with Soviet, North Korean, Cuban and Maoist ideologies. They debated the relative merits of these various ideologies, however far removed they may have been from Mexican realities. Not infrequently, they angrily split into factions over differences regarding, for example, the value of Cuban foco guerrilla strategy versus a Maoist-style "prolonged people's war" approach to establishing socialism in Mexico.

The Revolutionary Action Movement (MAR) is a notable example of a group supported by foreign communists. The MAR was fully established in 1969 and became active principally in Mexico's Federal District and the state of Veracruz, although MAR elements existed in some other states as well. MAR originated in the late 1960s in Moscow, where Mexican students attending Patrice Lumumba University-thanks to scholarships from the Mexican-Russian Cultural Exchange Institute in Mexico City and Monterrey-formed a "studies circle" that developed a concept for what became the insurgent group. The group received support from Soviet ally North Korea, and in 1968, the first small Mexican cadre was dispatched to a training center near Pyongyang for ideological and extensive guerrilla training. At least two other MAR contingents followed in 1969 and 1970. North Korean military personnel provided the instruction. The group sought to create instability in Mexico and establish the conditions for a

Numerous rural and urban groups-mostly small and transitory-emerged during the 1960s and 1970s. Their most notable leaders, such as Cabañas or Guerrero's Revolutionary National Civic Association leader Genaro Vázquez Rojas, developed loyal local followings that generated popular ballads and enduring legends celebrating their careers.¹³ The popular, romantic, revolutionary images of Cabañas and Vázquez seemed to be inspired more by Mexican inequalities than some larger communist vision and represented only one dimension of the 1960s, and 1970s insurgent and terrorist groups.

Clearly, many groups were encouraged, materially supported and sometimes trained by communist regimes abroad. Inspired by

Marxist-Leninist regime there. They recruited and trained new members in Mexico, supported themselves with bank robberies and kidnappings and conducted numerous armed assaults and acts of sabotage against regime targets. MAR structure included an urban guerrilla wing designated 2 de Octubre del MAR and a rural wing, *Ejército Popular del MAR*. The group was nearly destroyed by Mexican security forces in the 1970s and apparently disappeared by the early 1980s.¹⁴

By the end of the 1970s, earlier insurgent dangers in Mexico were fading from public view. The army and police had largely destroyed or dispersed small rural and urban groups, and the country turned its attention to modernization and development. Nevertheless, the memory of Cabañas and other 1960s' and 1970s' armed resistance figures continued to influence rural peasants and Indians in the southern mountains and disaffected citizens elsewhere in Mexico.

A few groups reorganized and endured. The Revolutionary Clandestine Workers' Union Party of the People (PROCUP) formed in 1971 to succeed the People's Union (UP). PROCUP declared a "prolonged people's war" to liberate Mexico "from the bourgeoisie and North American imperialism."¹⁵ The group, primarily active in Oaxaca and Guerrero, eventually achieved "ideological unification" with the remnants of Cabañas' Pdlp, forming PROCUP-Pdlp by 1980.¹⁶ Following a doctrine that combined traditional Marxist-Leninist and Maoist concepts, PROCUP-Pdlp continued minor, sporadic activity in the 1980s, including assassinations, robberies and kidnappings. Although emerging infrequently in public view in the 1980s, the group maintained its identity and its goal to establish a proletarian dictatorship and socialism in Mexico. It also expanded its cells to include at least rudimentary cadres in other states, reportedly including Jalisco, Puebla, Michoacan, Hidalgo, Morelos and Veracruz, as well as the Federal District.¹⁷ Emphasizing the old linkages, David Cabañas Barrientos, Lucio's brother, became a principal PROCUP-Pdlp leader and was jailed in 1990 for his alleged role in an assassination.

Cadres of what became the EZLN began to secretly organize in the early 1980s. The EZLN claims it was founded in 1982. Formed in part by members of old splintered groups and drawing on a predominantly indigenous following, EZLN's evolution was complex and is still debated.¹⁸ During its formative years, the group gave little indication of its existence, a posture that fit well with most Mexicans' perception that guerrillas were an issue of the past.



Comandantes Oscar and Vincente of the EPR's general command.

However, the guerrillas were not gone from every area of Mexico. In the early 1990s, leftist posters still littered the back streets of Guerrero municipalities, invoking Cabañas' memory.

Reports of secretive armed groups training in the mountains were as commonplace locally as they were heatedly denied by Mexican authorities.¹⁹ PROCUP-Pdip conducted a series of bombings and attacks in Guerrero, Oaxaca and the Federal District in 1990 in an unsuccessful bid to win the release of jailed members. These acts were characterized as the crimes of a few die-hard radicals. Occasional violent encounters between armed groups and Mexican army or police elements were publicly attributed to attacks by narcotraffickers or bandits-a plausible explanation that was probably partially correct.

On 1 January 1994, 15 years of official government and public complacency ended abruptly when the EZLN publicly announced its existence with the brief occupation of several towns in Chiapas, resulting in sharp clashes with the army that left nearly 150 dead. Stunned by the event and its implications for the rest of Mexico-and initially uncertain about the EZLN's origins and presence in other areas of the country-Mexican authorities and the media focused more closely on traditional areas of insurgency as potential outbreak sites.²⁰ Guerrero quickly moved to the forefront as an area that appeared ripe for revitalized insurgent activity. Hints from Subcomandante Marcos concerning EZLN links to other Mexican armed groups and Guerrero's proximity to the troubled states of Oaxaca, Puebla, Michoacán and Morelos led authorities to believe that some areas in Guerrero were likely leftist guerrilla strongholds which had the potential to destabilize other areas.

Guerrero state-about the size of West Virginia-has a population of more than 2.6 million dispersed throughout some 75 municipalities.²¹ The population includes a substantial Indian component. The Sierra Madre del Sur mountain range parallels Guerrero's Pacific coast and was a traditional guerrilla operating area for Cabañas and Vázquez. The mountains help define the rural region's character and contribute to its natural beauty, isolation and enduring poverty. While the capital of Chilpancingo is an important administrative and cultural center, the famed resort of Acapulco, together with a few tourist areas such as Taxco and Iguala, are far better known to North Americans and other foreigners. Guerrero presents as striking a contrast between wealth and poverty as any Mexican region.

As the Zapatista uprising settled into a stalemate including on-and-off peace talks; simmering, low-level, periodic violence; and remarkable international media success for the EZLN, guerrilla variants began emerging in Guerrero and surrounding states. For example, the Clandestine Armed Forces (FAC) announced its existence in 1995. The FAC was reportedly active in Guerrero's Costa Grande, particularly among radical groups in the Coyuca de Benitez community.²² The Liberation Army of the Southern Sierra (ELSS) also surfaced in 1995. Reportedly comprising a diverse collection of armed groups operating in Guerrero's coastal mountains, the ELSS claimed to have once planned a massive uprising but reorganized into cells to support the group's activities for a sustained time period. Numerous other groups announced themselves or were reported in Guerrero and elsewhere from January 1994 to June 1996. Information about their composition and activities varies greatly and in some cases is limited only to the group's name and the circumstances under which it was identified.

Of particular note is reported guerrilla activity in Oaxaca state, which has both a tradition of insurgency and shares Guerrero's poverty. By spring 1996, antigovernment and other armed groups were reported in several areas of Oaxaca. While guerrilla activity in the state was

sporadic for more than 30 years, rumors concerning Oaxacan armed groups intensified following the EZLN's appearance. Two groups illustrate the Oaxacan "insurgent" problem and its heavily indigenous composition. The Clandestine Indigenous National Liberation Army claims to operate in Oaxaca's mountains and urban areas and to include Indians from 16 ethnic groups. A second group, the Movement for Trique Unification and Struggle, purports to represent disaffected, poverty-stricken Trique Indians who live in the mountains.

These and other disaffected organizations decry the extreme poverty and diminishing prospects in a state with the greatest number of family dependents per worker in the country. Large numbers of Oaxacan teenagers are now reaching working age and do not have any job prospects, making them potential recruits for guerrilla or criminal groups. In both Oaxaca and Guerrero, the extent of actual guerrilla activity is clouded by the simultaneous activities of strong narcotrafficking and bandit gangs as well as so-called White Guard armed groups employed by local landowners and political bosses.²⁴ While the proliferation of groups in the Sierra Madre del Sur and elsewhere raised the threat of broader guerrilla activity in Mexico, the appearance of a new armed group made the threat real.

The Popular Liberation Army and Other Groups

On 28 June 1995, 17 *campesino* activists with the Southern Sierra Campesino Organization were murdered by Guerrero State Judicial Police at the Aguas Blancas (White Waters) community near Coyuca de Benitez. The automatic weapons attack was captured on videotape and generated a firestorm of protest and violence that eventually led to the Guerrero state governor's dismissal and the arrest of several state police officers. The action galvanized *campesino* organizations, including the armed groups whose announced existence had been followed with little action. The attack revived the memory of a state police attack 28 years earlier against protesting teachers led by Lucio Cabañas at the town of Atoyac, 40 km northwest of Coyuca. That incident sent Cabañas into the mountains with his guerrillas.



A labor demonstration in September 1996 in Mexico City along the Paseo de Reforma.

several thousand assembled people that Mexico's newest guerrilla movement had arrived.²⁵ In a communiqué read at the scene by the masked "Captain Emiliano"-and thereafter designated the Aguas Blancas Manifesto-the group identified itself as the Popular Liberation Army (EPR) and stated its goals:

- Remove the "illegitimate" Mexican government and the foreign forces sustaining it.

One year after the 1995 massacre, dozens of masked, armed men in uniforms attended a 28 June 1996 commemoration of the murders to announce to

- Restore popular sovereignty.
- Implement economic, political and social change.
- Establish fair international relations.
- Punish those guilty of crimes against the people.

The EPR asserted that conditions facing Sierra Madre del Sur peasants were "similar to those which in 1967 and 1968 caused Comandantes Lucio Cabañas and Genaro Vázquez to take up arms against exploitation and oppression." After laying a wreath made from plants that "witnessed the cowardly murder" in 1995 and firing their AK-47 and AR-15 rifles into the air 17 times in memory of the murdered campesinos, the EPR disappeared.²⁶ Within hours, however, EPR elements distributing Manifesto copies engaged Mexican police in a fire fight near the Guerrero capital of Chilpancingo, wounding several policemen and a civilian. This was the beginning of a series of attacks and armed actions that established the EPR as the most serious armed threat to Mexico's stability.²⁷

Mexican civilian authorities quickly characterized the EPR as bandits and criminals and-in the interior minister's words-a "pantomime." Meanwhile, army units were rushing to Guerrero in truck convoys, Panhard Lynx armored vehicles, high-mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles and helicopters. A 2 July 1996 EPR communiqué warned of "imminent" armed clashes with the army and police.²⁸ The army, whose internal intelligence assessments were always more informed and accurate than government press releases indicated, had already concluded that the EPR was a genuine guerrilla force-better equipped and organized than the EZLN-and should be dealt with immediately.²⁹



EPR

This view was underscored by a 17 July 1996 attack on an army patrol in southwestern Guerrero, where several soldiers were reportedly wounded and a civilian was killed, and by an ambush of a navy patrol two weeks later that resulted in a wounded officer. The EPR confirmed it was a genuine force in a 7 August interview with selected journalists at a hidden spot in the Sierra Madre del Este, a mountain range that runs north through Oaxaca, San Luis Potosi, Veracruz, Hidalgo and Tamaulipas. The interview was held hundreds of kilometers from the site of the EPR's first appearance. At this EPR "tactical camp," representatives of the group's "general

command" disclosed the organization was established 1 May 1994. By 18 May, the EPR had joined with other resistance groups to form "a single political-military structure," designated the Revolutionary Popular Democratic Party (PDPR).³⁰ The PDPR, governed by a "central committee," coordinated the activities of 14 guerrilla and opposition groups.³¹ A few of the these groups had announced their existence earlier, while others went public for the first time. The most notorious of the 14 was clearly PROCUP-PdIp, which linked Mexico's guerrilla past with the present. The Mexican government asserted that the PROCUP-PdIp was the EPR's armed

wing and heart.³² The complexity of Mexico's guerrilla past, however, makes any such facile judgment questionable. Continued evaluation of the EPR/PDPR's origins, constituent members and affiliations is necessary.

On the day of the interview, EPR snipers killed an army cook and wounded several others in a Guerrero attack. Three days later, an army patrol was ambushed in Guerrero, and two soldiers were wounded. The EPR's Comandante José Arturo acknowledged that the group robbed banks and conducted kidnappings to raise funds and stressed that many other armed groups were active in Mexico. Implying that many EPR attacks were unreported, commanders claimed that from 28 June to 25 August 1996, some 59 Mexican army soldiers were killed in Guerrero engagements alone.³³

Whatever the accuracy of that figure, EPR armed actions on 28 and 29 August exceeded all government and popular conceptions of the group's organization, strength and capability. A coordinated multistate attack against army, police and other government targets in Oaxaca, Guerrero, Puebla and the Federal District left as many as 18 people dead and more than two dozen wounded, according to media reports. The EPR claimed 41 officials were killed and 48 were wounded.³⁴ Guerrillas operated in groups of up to 130. EPR guerrillas blocked roads and distributed pamphlets in Chiapas and seized a radio station in Tabasco.³⁵ Shootings and propaganda activity were reported in Guanajuato state, evidently without casualties.

This series of assaults marked the beginning of periodic EPR armed actions that have continued into 1997. According to knowledgeable Mexicans and the EPR itself, these attacks have been greatly underreported. Ambushes and raids have inflicted military and police casualties in prime EPR operating areas and elsewhere. For example, the day after the August strikes, 40 armed men in civilian dress-presumed to be EPR-attacked an army convoy in Michoacán state and killed one soldier and wounded several others. The EPR's presence may extend into as many as 11 states.³⁶ Interviews, communiqués, two election cease-fires and proselytizing activities have kept the EPR in the public eye, even as the Mexican army and police arrest suspects and establish a large, visible presence in all affected areas. The EPR's December seizure of two Oaxaca radio stations-and its announcement that it was prepared to carry out "liberty suicides" to topple the government added a strange and surprising dimension.³⁷

After several months of relative quiet early in 1997, EPR clashes with the army in late May left at least five government troops dead and others wounded. These two firefights- both in Guerrero State- also left four guerrillas killed. At the same time, other armed groups-which may or may not be associated with the EPR-have continued to appear, including the Guanajuato Revolutionary Army, which surfaced in August 1996; the Revolutionary Army for Popular Insurrection, which issued a November 1996 "Declaration of the North" calling for political and economic reform, expressing support for the EZLN and EPR and generating a security alert as far north as Tijuana on the US border; and the Armed Front for the Liberation of Marginalized People of Guerrero (FALPMG), which issued a two-page communiqué in Atoyac in early December calling for truly free elections, better living conditions and an end to the persecution of other opposition forces.³⁸ The FALPMG followed up its initial declaration with a January 1997 communiqué largely reiterating its earlier demands and reminding readers that Guerrero

peasants rebelled in the 1840s to reclaim appropriated land.³⁹ No armed actions by these groups-if indeed they constitute real organizations-have been documented.

As the new year began, yet another guerrilla group-this one with more visible teeth-made its presence known with the murder of four people 90 miles east of Acapulco in the Guerrero district of Copanatoyac. Uniformed men with AK-47s sought out and executed the individuals for unspecified crimes. The group members left behind a statement identifying themselves as Justice Army of Defenseless People representatives and decrying the lack of justice for oppressed people.⁴⁰ Such actions may be the violent resolution of a local dispute, a government provocation, an armed encounter between drug-trafficking rivals or an assault by a private paramilitary group. On the other hand, Mexican commentators, such as Indian affairs specialist Carlos Montemayor, note that for 200 years, "the epithet 'guerrilla' has always been used synonymously with bandit, gunman, traitor to the fatherland or common criminal," characterizations that obscure the violence and social problems that sometimes lead to outright armed opposition.⁴¹

While the true nature, strength, affiliation and even actual existence of such self-declared groups are unclear, their proliferation is an escalating problem. Mexican security concerns surrounding the guerrilla groups also include the large influx of arms into the country, many of which come from the United States.⁴² Mexico continues to investigate reports that foreign subversives-such as the Basque Fatherland Party, Peru's SL and the remnants of various Central American groups-are collaborating with Mexican guerrilla organizations. Private support from European, US and other foreign sources-which clearly existed for the Zapatistas-is undetermined for the harder-edged EPR. The relationship between the EPR and the EZLN is also questionable. While Subcomandante Marcos distanced the Zapatistas from the EPR and criticized the EPR's actions, the fear that more radical EZLN elements are joining or supporting the EPR remains real. Finally, the extent to which the EPR and other groups enjoy support from segments of Mexican society is a question not easily dismissed by some Mexican observers who believe popular links are deeper than generally believed.⁴⁴

Despite its rich guerrilla past, Mexico's insurgency problems over the last 40 years have never been as intense as those of Central and South America. Nevertheless, some Mexican commentators see similarities in a resurgence of Latin American guerrilla activity and the proliferation of armed groups in Mexico. At the beginning of 1997, an editorial in a leading Mexican newspaper drew analogies among the MRTA in Peru, the FPMR in Chile, guerrillas in Colombia, the armed seizure of land in Brazil and parts of Central America and the emergence of serious guerrilla activity in Mexico. The common thread was judged to be neoliberal economic policies in Mexico and elsewhere that have caused widespread unemployment, a sharp reduction in standard of living, disruption of social relationships and a loss of sovereignty to foreign economic interests.⁴⁵ Whatever this assessment's merits, opposition groups in several Latin American states cite similar reasons for the revival-or creation-of armed resistance movements.

Virtually no specialist has said the EPR/PDPR-or the EZLN-can overthrow the Mexican government by force. Indeed, it is unclear whether the EPR and its associated groups and other announced movements are more or less than what they seem to be. However, it is evident that armed resistance movements in Mexico are far more complex than generally recognized, that

elements of the EPR/PDPR have strong links to mythic past movements and that these groups constitute a violent response to enduring grievances. Although they lack the capability to pose a serious armed threat to government security forces, they have the military capacity to generate local and even national instability. While thus far falling short of EZLN standards, the EPR/PDPR are effectively using the national and international media to draw attention to their causes and points of view. They are also effectively raising funds, acquiring arms and conducting raids, ambushes and attacks on government forces and state targets. In terms of national and international attention, the contrast between the EPR/PDPR and the groups led by Cabañas and Vázquez 25 years ago is striking. The latter two groups received scant attention beyond Mexico and Guerrero, while the EPR/PDPR's activities are closely scrutinized by international media as the guerrillas demonstrate their ability to execute armed actions, hold press events and issue communiqués.

US security goals place a premium on stability in Mexico and other states in the hemisphere. The United States has condemned EPR/PDPR armed actions as terrorism and reprehensible while expressing full confidence in the Mexican government and army to deal with them. Following the EPR's multistate attacks in August 1996, then US Ambassador David Jones offered Mexico support, including information exchanges and training. While US-Mexican military cooperation remains a sensitive, complex issue on both sides of the border, this slowly evolving relationship will be shaped by a recognition that "the two nations share ties of history, culture and friendship."⁴⁶ There is clearly a case to be made that many US-Mexican and hemispheric security problems—which are transnational and affect many countries—will become more common. Thus, cooperation is vital for their resolution and the elimination of their root causes.

NOTES

1. These include the 1992 El Salvador peace accords that ended 12 years of civil war and brought the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) insurgents into the political process; the Sandinistas' loss of political power and electoral defeats in Nicaragua; Peru's presumed near defeats of the Shining Path (*Sendero Luminoso* [SL]) and smaller Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) insurgencies; and Guatemala's peace with the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (*Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca* [URNG]) in January 1997, ending 35 years of civil war.
2. For data on specific countries and issues, see Henry Raymont, "Upsurge of Guerrilla Movements Rekindles Militarism," *O Estado de São Paulo* (22 September 1996), as translated in Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS)-LAT-96-206; "Latin America's Backlash," *The Economist* (30 November 1996), 15-16; "The Backlash in Latin America," *The Economist* (30 November 1996), 19-21; and Katherine Ellison, "Guerrilla Warfare Stalks Latin America," *Miami Herald* (21 December 1996).
3. Raymont.

4. As widely reported, a new generation of guerrilla hobbyists and more serious activists are thriving on the Internet in support of subversive groups around the world. Indeed, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, the Argentina-born Cuban insurgent killed by Bolivian security forces 30 years ago, still generates much interest on the Internet and throughout the world. See "Che Stages a Comeback: Revival in the Shops as Real Guerrillas Fight On," *Latin America Weekly Report* (12 September 1996), 414-15. The suspected operational communications used by group cadres, drug traffickers and criminal groups are more serious. See Nestor Martínez, "Traffickers Claimed Using Internet," *La Jornada* (7 December 1995).

5. For example, a bid to enter Argentinian politics by the former leader of the Montoneros (the extreme leftist *Peronistas* from the 1970s) was met with rejection and public scorn. Former supporters of the one-time leader of the violent People's Revolutionary Army (ERP) show no interest in winning his release. See "Terrorism Returning to Southern Cone? Attacks in Chile & Argentina Foster Fears," *Latin America Weekly Report* (2 May 1996). In Brazil and Venezuela, former guerrillas have successfully made the transition into politics, government, business or humanitarian organizations. Remnants of old insurgent groups in Paraguay, Uruguay and Ecuador are largely inactive, while some former guerrillas in Argentina, Chile and elsewhere are widely believed to be working now for the very government intelligence services they used to fight. See Raymont; Ellison; Abraham Lama, "Where Have All the Rebels Gone?" *Interpress Service* (6 May 1996); and Abraham Lama, "Rebels Retreat as Ideologies Crumble," *Interpress Service* (3 May 1996).

6. Hugo Guzmán, "Rearticulación rodriguista?" *Reforma* (31 December 1996); and Federico Quilodran, "Chile Hunts for Guerrillas," Associated Press (31 December 1996). The Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez (FPMR) has been periodically accused of attacks since civilian rule was restored in Chile in 1990. See "Terrorism Returning to Southern Cone?"

7. The MRTA is notable for its links to other insurgent groups in Colombia, Bolivia, Ecuador and Chile. Among its most ambitious plans has been creating an Andean Liberation Army (*Ejército Andino de Liberación* [EAL]) with Bolivian and Chilean guerrillas to escalate insurgency in the three countries. See "Los Condenados de Tupac Amaru," *Reforma* (21 December 1996); Abraham Lama, "Who Is 'Comandante Huerta,' and What Does He Want?" *Interpress Service* (23 December 1996); "MRTA Reportedly Attempts to Create Andean Liberation Army," Radio Broadcast Service Notimex, 1002 Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) (18 December 1996), as translated in FBIS-LAT-96-244; and Tim Johnson, "Piecing Together a 'Spectacular Attack' Plan Could Have Been Hatched By a Small Group, Experts Say," *Miami Herald* (20 December 1996).

8. Some months before MRTA seized the hostages at the Japanese ambassador's compound in Lima, Peru, President Fujimori noted that "several years more of SL and NMTA actions were possible." (Reuter News Service, 4 August 1996.)

9. "Hundreds Killed in Colombian War in 1996," Reuter (8 January 1997). In addition to hundreds of Colombian armed forces and guerrillas killed in direct actions, Colombia had nearly 26,000 murders, some associated with insurgent activity, in 1996.

10. Antonio Castellanos, "Más de 91 millones de habitantes en México hasta noviembre de 95," *La Jornada* (16 December 1996).
11. Juan Miguel de Mora, *Las Guerrillas en México y Jenaro Vázquez Rojas* (Mexico City: Editora Latino América, S.A., 1972), 293-94.
12. "Mexican Guerrilla Leader Reported Killed By Troops," *New York Times* (3 December 1974).
13. After several years of robbing, kidnapping and attacking state targets in Guerrero, Genaro Vázquez Rojas was killed in a 1972 car crash in Michoacán state. See Tomás Tenorio Galinda, "Una vieja visión de la guerrilla," *Reforma* (16 July 1995); "The Announced Guerrilla Movement," *El Financiero* (18 November 1994), as translated in FBIS-LAT-94-226, 12-13; and Orlando Ortíz, *Genaro Vázquez*, 3rd ed. (Mexico City: Editorial Disgenes, S.A., 1973).
14. Salvador Castañeda, a prominent former MAR member, has written about its activities. Among his observations was that MAR failed to establish necessary support bases outside their immediate operating areas before undertaking armed actions. See "Revolutionary Action Movement;" Tomás Tenorio Galinda, "Una vieja visión de la guerrilla," *Reforma* (16 July 1995); "The Announced Guerrilla Movement;" Juan Miguel de Mora, *Las Guerrillas en México y Jenaro Vázquez Rojas* (Mexico City: Editora Latino América, S.A., 1972), 409-25; Salvador Castañeda, "Things are Going to be Difficult for the EZLN," interview, January 1995, in "Documents on Mexican Politics," edited by Alex López-Ortíz, for the Internet from a published version in the German-language magazine *Analyse & Kritik*, No. 373.
15. The People's Union (UP), formed by Guatemalan Jose María Ortíz Vides, reportedly advocated the proletariat use short, medium and long phases to seize power. An intermediate organization was designated the Clandestine Revolutionary Organization (Organización Revolucionaria Clandestina [ORCUP]) existed from 1972 to 1976. See Tomás Tenorio Galinda, "Una vieja visión de la guerrilla," *Reforma* (16 July 1995); "The Announced Guerrilla Movement"; Pedro Matías and Ignacio Ramírez, "Militarización y 'alerta roja' en Oaxaca: el Ejército busca grupos armados relacionados con la guerrilla," *Proceso* (8 January 1996); "El Ejército busca grupos armados relacionados con la guerrilla," *Proceso* (8 January 1996), 20-21; and Notimex, 0455 GMT (31 August 1996).
16. Ignacio Ramírez, "El PROCUP-Pdip Reivindicia Actos de Sabotaje en Solidaridad con el EZLN y Expresa: 'Vivimos la Militarización del País,'" *Proceso* (24 July 1995), 16-21; "Sí; Hay Guerrilla en Guerrero," *El Norte* (24 July 1995); and Ignacio Ramírez, " `Alerta Roja' en la sierra de Guerrero por la actividad de grupos guerrilleros," *Proceso* (7 August 1995), 9.
17. Notimex, 0455 GMT 31 August 1996.
18. Among the old groups whose members reportedly formed cadres for EZLN organizational activity are the National Liberation Forces (*Fuerzas de Liberación Nacional* [FLN]), formerly the National Liberation Armed Forces (*Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional* [FALN]); the

Committee for Revolutionary Struggle (*Comite de Lucha Revolucionaria* [CLR]); and the Mexican Insurgent Army (*Ejército de Insurgentes Mexicano* [EIM]).

19. In 1991, for example, a US Army officer specializing in Mexican security affairs noted such posters on the back streets of Taxco, Guerrero, which is frequented by foreign tourists. Similarly, there have been reports that graffiti praising Cabañas' group and its successors has been spotted in remote Guerrero towns. See Anita Snow, "Mexico Rebels Have Violent Past," Associated Press (2 September 1996).

20. PROCUP-Pdlp's detonation of a bomb in a Mexico City shopping center and their abortive rocket attack on a Federal District Army base (*Campo Militar Número Uno*) to signify their support of the Zapatistas raised the specter of broader terrorist attacks. Fortunately, such attacks did not materialize.

21. Guerrero has an area of about 25,070 square miles, compared with West Virginia's 24,181 square miles. The total population of Mexico in the 1990 census was calculated to be 81.2 million. For more statistical data, see James B. Pick and Edgar W. Butler, *The Mexico Handbook: Economic and Demographic Maps and Statistics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press Inc., 1994).

22. The group has also been referred to as the Clandestine Armed Forces of National Liberation (*Fuerzas Armadas Clandestinas de Liberación Nacional* [FACLN]). See Ramírez, " `Alerta Roja' en la sierra de Guerrero."

23. Ibid. The reorganization reportedly took place following the PRI's success in the August 1994 elections.

24. Matías and Rodríguez.

25. The guerrillas numbered from as few as 38 to as many as 100, according to varying reports. The most prominent weapons were AK-47s. Their green uniforms and boots were described as good quality.

26. The text of the *Aguas Blancas Manifesto*, distributed in Spanish and partially in the Indian (Aztec) Nahuatl language, was published in some Mexican newspapers, including *La Jornada*. For a summary, see the Internet report, *MEXPAZ Analysis-Special Issue* (29 June 1996). *MEXPAZ* is an electronic journal.

27. Gloria Leticia Díaz and Gerardo Galarza, "Indicios, rastos, pistas, testimonios de grupos armados en Guerrero desde 1992 a la fecha," *Proceso* (30 June 1996), 21-23 and 25-27; "Mexico Rebels in First Confrontation," United Press International (29 June 1996); and Phil Gunson, "Tradition Supports Mexico's New Guerrillas," *Guardian* (12 September 1996).

28. " `Inminente un choque armado' con el Ejército o la policía, informó el grupo armado," *La Jornada* (3 July 1996).

29. Carlos Marín, "Conclusión de la Secretaría de la Defensa: El EPR es una verdadera guerrilla, amalgama de grupos radicales, con mayor decisión y mejor equipo que los zapatistas," *Proceso* (7 July 1996), 24, 27, 29 and 31.

30. In Spanish, PRPD is *Partido Democrático Popular Revolucionario*.

31. Tzinia Chellet, "Clandestine Armed Groups Announce New Party," *Reforma* (9 August 1996), as translated in FBIS-LAT-96-156; and Maribel Gutierrez, "EPR To Continue `Armed Self-Defense,' *La Jornada* (27 October 1996), as translated in FBIS-LAT-96-214.

32. Fernando Mayolo López, "Transfiguraciones de una `pantomima,' armada que hace bolas al gobierno," *Proceso* (1 September 1996), 13-17.

33. Salvador Guerrero Chipres, "EPR Commanders on Strength, Army Casualties," *La Jornada* (25 August 1996), as translated in FBIS-LAT-96-169.

34. Henry Tricks, Reuter (15 September 1996).

35. Salvador Corro, "En una sangrienta noche de terror, las fuerzas del EPR destruyeron el mito de la pantomima," *Proceso* (September 1996), 13-17; and Guillermo Correa, "El fuego, el golpe y la maniobra, tema central del Curso Básico de Guerra del EPR," *Proceso* (1 September 1996), 18-23.

36. Steve Fainaru, "Mexico's War Within," *The Boston Globe* (17 September 1996).

37. "Mexican Guerrillas Vow Suicide Attacks," *Associated Press* (4 December 1996).

38. Reports of an "army of Sierra Negra" along the Oaxaca-Puebla border also have circulated. See "Another Guerrilla Movement?" *Mexico Update*, No. 100 (27 November 1996); "New Rebel Group Emerges, Issues Declaration," Broadcast Service EFE, 1717 GMT 21 November 1996, as translated in FBIS-LAT-96-227; "Manifesto Claims New Mexican Guerrilla Group Born," Reuter (21 November 1996); "Fourth Mexican Guerrilla Group Proclaims Existence," Reuter (5 December 1996); "Mexican Rebel Group Emerges, Another Holds Rally," Reuter (5 December 1996); and "EPR Strikes in Seven States," *MEXPAZ Analysis*, No. 87 (30 August 1996).

39. "Third Alleged Rebel Group Demands Relief for Poor," *Associated Press* (4 January 1996).

40. *La Jornada* (4 January 1997), as cited in "Two New Rebel Groups Demand Relief for Poor," *Associated Press* (4 January 1997).

41. Carlos Montemayor, "Chiapas, Again," *La Jornada* (12 February 1995), as translated in FBIS-LAT-95-032.

42. David Aponte and Juan Manuel Venegas, "Red internacional trafica armas aquí," *La Jornada* (2 January 1997). Fears about the guerrillas having increasingly effective weapons

available are reflected in the report of the seizure of "three surface-to-air missiles" from alleged EPR members in Chiapas. The report was challenged by the 7th Military Region commander, who said the captured weapons included a rocket launcher and three 70mm missiles intended for use against vehicles. See Julio César López, "Supuestos militantes del EPR, detenidos con un lanzagranadas en la sierra chiapaneca," *Proceso* (24 November 1996), 21.

43. "Tradition Supports Mexico's New Guerrillas;" and "Zapatista Supporters in Mexico See Civil War Risk," Reuter (5 September 1996). The EZLN's political arm, the Zapatista National Liberation Front (*Frente Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* [FZLN]), has felt some pressure and defensiveness in its on-again/off-again negotiations with the government, given the contrast between the EZLN/FZLN negotiating posture and EPR/PDPR armed actions.

44. Victor Ruíz Arrazola, "Secretos, la vinculación entre EPR y sociedad civil," *La Jornada* (17 September 1996).

45. "Violencia: Un Terreno Abonado," *La Jornada* (5 January 1996).

46. Voice of America editorial, "Rebel Insurgency in Mexico" (5 September 1996); and Reuter (10 September 1996).